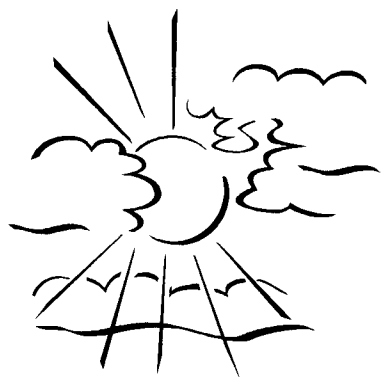


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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LOCAL COMMENT: Foster care is better than audit suggests

September 4, 2005

BY MICHAEL J. ANDEREGG

A recent audit by Michigan's auditor general, Thomas M. McTavish, found that the Department of Human Services foster care program was "generally not effective in meeting its outcome goals." Among other things, the audit recommended periodic criminal history checks for foster parents, and better documentation of caseworker visits to children.

The Office of Auditor General report has generated significant public concern. A state senator has announced he will hold hearings to question Human Services about these issues.

Unfortunately, McTavish's conclusions go far beyond the evidence he cites to support them, and this is not the first time.

In 2003, the auditor general released an audit of conservatorship cases handled by probate courts. These cases involve court supervision of a person's assets. The OAG concluded that court-appointed conservators' accountings were generally not "accurate or valid." The report also concluded that court procedures for monitoring conservatorship cases were "generally not valid." After the audit findings were released, the Supreme Court conducted a review in every court in the state, concluding "the vast majority of probate courts were either following the Estates and Protected Individuals Code and had appropriate procedures, or had minor issues that were quickly corrected."

All of us should be concerned about the safety and well-being of children who are placed in foster care. However, the foster care system does not operate in a vacuum.

The cases that result in foster care are reviewed in courts like mine every three months. Every child under court jurisdiction has a court-appointed attorney guardian ad litem, obligated by law to visit with the child before each hearing and to make recommendations about what is in the child's best interest. Cases from each county are reviewed by trained citizen volunteers from the state's Foster Care Review Board program. Michigan has a Children's Ombudsman, whose job it is to investigate abuses in the system and to seek solutions or advocate for preventive measures.

Overall, Michigan's foster care program is successful in meeting the needs of the children who pass through it. In my 29 years as a juvenile court judge (including eight years as a trustee of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges), I have had an opportunity to see the best and worst of foster care systems. Michigan's is one of the best. It is true that Michigan failed the federal Child and Family Services Review in 2002. What the auditor general chose not to mention is that every other state also failed.

The Child and Family Services Review process was established by the federal government to identify best practices and to encourage states to work toward those practices. In most categories, Michigan's system was very near the expected standard of performance.

Michigan's foster care system has recently undergone another federal review. Reassessment results of the Court Improvement Program are quite positive.

None of this is to say that our foster care system is perfect.

Improvements can always be made; however, there is always an associated cost.

More frequent criminal history checks will cost more money. Time workers spend documenting their visits will not be spent visiting children. There are times when placing a child in a home where one of the adults has a felony conviction may be the best available option for a particular child when all of the circumstances of the case are considered. It is unfair in condemning an entire system because of administrative shortcomings, many of which are caused by a lack of funding.

If the criteria for success or failure of an audit is whether one's conclusions fairly reflect the underlying evidence and are targeted to evaluate the most important functions of the agency being audited, the Department of Human Services audit gets an F.

MICHAEL J. ANDEREGG, presiding judge of the Family Division of the Marquette Circuit Court, is a past president of the Michigan Probate Judges Association and a member of the state Foster Care Review Board Advisory Committee. Write to him in care of the Free Press Editorial Page, 600 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48226.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

DHS director says department has made significant strides to protecting children and families; calls for strong action on behalf of children and families.

September 6, 2005

LANSING - In a statement delivered to legislators today, Department of Human Services (DHS) director Marianne Udow responded to a recent Office of Auditor General (OAG) audit of the Michigan foster care program by correcting misinformation and setting forth a list of actions already underway in her department to reform Michigan's foster care program.

"Our first priority is to protect all of Michigan's children," Udow said. "Although the audit report is misleading and incomplete, we are taking it seriously and taking steps to thoroughly evaluate the status of providers and the safety of children in our care."

Udow disputes information in the audit report that cites 321 foster care providers as having what the OAG calls "disqualifying or potentially disqualifying" convictions.

"It is critical to understand who these people are. Of the 321 caregivers mentioned in the report, nearly two-thirds are biological or adoptive parents – not foster parents," Udow said in her statement. "We have been working with these families, we have been involved in these children's lives, and we have been helping these parents improve so their families can be safely reunited."

"The auditor has identified some of the same areas we have been focusing on for the past two years," Udow continued. "After inheriting the problems described in the audit report, we have already made fundamental changes in the system and will continue to do so."

Among the efforts already underway to strengthen the system is an automated process to do periodic background checks and Web-based monitoring of foster care providers.

"At the same time, we are fundamentally reforming Michigan's child welfare system using proven tools that target prevention, early intervention, appropriate placement, family preservation, and permanence," Udow stated. "Our Family to Family initiative achieved positive outcomes for children in Wayne County this past year, and is now in place in 20 Michigan counties. The Family to Family approach has a national track record of positive results in many other states."

In her statement, Udow calls for the legislature to strengthen statutes and support the department with the resources necessary to carry them out.

- more -

"We are calling for a change to the licensing act (PA 116) to mandate periodic background checks. SB 615, SB 504 and HB 4936, now pending in the legislature, change the requirements for child day care providers. If these bills cannot be amended to include foster care providers, we will recommend additional legislation to do so," she said.

"In order to create lasting change, we must all follow through on a shared commitment and recognize that more resources are critical to strengthening the protection of children," Udow concluded. "Caseload ratios in Michigan range from 25:1 to 40:1, far higher than the optimal ratio recommended by the Child Welfare League of America. We believe the protection of children warrants special consideration in the debate over budget allocations. This is an investment that will pay great dividends for the state, for families, and most importantly, for children."

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs

First wave of evacuees arrives

Tuesday, September 06, 2005

By Nate Reens

TheGrand Rapids Press

BATTLE CREEK -- Carrying plastic bags and paper sacks of personal items -- likely donated by Hurricane Katrina relief efforts and the only things they own -- about 289 homeless New Orleans-area residents found a place Monday to call their own in Michigan.

The Fort Custer Training Center will be home for a week until they are put on the move again into a city they do not recognize, just as they departed an area that no longer resembles what they remember.

One woman is eight months pregnant. Several are in wheelchairs.

The men, women and children who arrived at the Air National Guard Base in Battle Creek were bused to Fort Custer, and segregated from onlookers to allow them time to settle in.

National Guard Capt. Steven Webb had at least one promise for the group. "We recognize they've gone through seven days of hell," he said. "We're here to see that their next seven days are 180 degrees from that."

The evacuees will be housed at Fort Custer and later dispersed into as many as 30 communities, including Grand Rapids, where volunteers are preparing the former West YMCA on Leonard Street for Katrina survivors.

Monday's arrivals were the first of up to 10,000 evacuees Gov. Jennifer Granholm vowed to accept. It was not immediately known whether the first arrivals had ties to Michigan or if they volunteered to come here.

"We have to learn who's here and what their needs are," Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said.

"Our first priority is to give them what they need, and go from there."

State officials plan to keep the evacuees for up to nine months but acknowledge their stay could be longer.

"So much depends on the efforts in the Gulf region," Boyd said. "They're welcome to stay as long as they want."

Retired Battle Creek teacher Bill Hanner stood across from the National Guard base to welcome the group. He was among about 60 people waving flags and homemade signs as buses took the evacuees to their makeshift residences.

"Can you imagine how they feel?" Hanner asked. "They've lost their homes and everything they've known and grown up with. The least we can do is show them we want to help."

As one bus drove past, a man hung out the window and screamed, "Thank you." Others waved and cried.

The Rev. J. Louis Felton, pastor of Galilee Missionary Baptist Church in Kalamazoo, greeted the evacuees along with Red Cross officials and lawmakers, including Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich.

Felton said he witnessed a range of emotions, from children happy to be back on the ground after five hours on a plane to senior citizens crying because they left the only home they knew.

"It seems remote when you see it on TV, but, to me, these people aren't refugees as they're called. They're fellow Americans," Felton said.

'A home in Michigan'

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

jparikh@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8558

BATTLE CREEK -- The first wave of evacuees from Hurricane Katrina arrived in Battle Creek from New Orleans on Monday looking tired and disheveled.

Men in T-shirts and shorts and women in tank tops and jeans streamed out of two Delta Air Lines Inc. jets clutching clear plastic bags and duffle bags. They slowly walked toward a 24,000-square-foot maintenance hangar at Battle Creek's Air National Guard Base that had been set up with tables and chairs, sandwiches, bottled water, blankets and a telephone bank.

Under a clear blue sky, the first of two Boeing 757 jets touched down at about 5:10 p.m., and the second jet landed minutes later. Arriving were 289 passengers believed to be New Orleans-area residents who rode out the hurricane because they couldn't afford to leave, said State Rep.

Lorence Wenke, R-Augusta.

Wenke was among the local, state and national leaders welcoming evacuees as they stepped onto the tarmac. "These are the poorest of the poor. These are people who look like they've never had a break in their lives," he said.

Pastor J. Louis Felton, of Galilee Baptist Church in Kalamazoo, was among those greeting the storm victims. He said area churches that serve the African-American community will be called on to raise money and adopt evacuee families. They also will be sending vans to the Fort Custer Training Center to transport evacuees and to provide necessities such as clothing.

"We want to let them know that they have a home in Michigan," Felton said.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Saturday said she had offered assistance to up to 10,000 evacuees. She said she expected about 1,500 evacuees to be transported into Battle Creek in three waves. More than 30 Battle Creek school buses had been lined up behind the maintenance hangar since Saturday when evacuees were supposed to arrive. The arrival was pushed to Sunday, finally occurring on Monday.

The buses were transporting evacuees to the Fort Custer Training Center, about five miles west of the Air National Guard Base, where they will be housed in 13 barracks for between three and seven days until they can be placed in a community within the state.

As the buses of evacuees left the base for the center, they were greeted by about 50 area residents standing alongside Dickman Road who waved and held up signs reading "Love" and

"Welcome."

"I just wanted to welcome them and let them know that we are here to help," said Brenda Hightower, 47, of Battle Creek.

Kalamazoo Mayor Robert Jones, who joined other officials in welcoming the survivors, said the city is examining what temporary housing it can offer the evacuees.

"We need to move people out of this emergency-shelter situation into housing where they can stay for six months to one year," Jones said. "We don't want to put them through any more trauma."

At the Fort Custer Training Center, evacuees were given welcome bags containing towels, personal-hygiene items, books and ready-to-eat food. They were issued identification cards with their photographs because many are believed to have left New Orleans with little more than the clothes they were wearing.

Among the first evacuees off the plane was a young woman dressed in a black shirt and jeans who was eight months pregnant, according to Terri Franklin, marketing and communications director for the Kalamazoo-area chapter of the American Red Cross. A fellow passenger held her arm as she walked toward a wheelchair, one of about nine that lined up for passengers requiring immediate medical assistance.

U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, said one evacuee had been taken to Battle Creek Health System. He did not say why.

“They’re all in remarkably good shape for what they’ve been through,” Schwarz said. “They’re delighted to be here. There was a cheer in both planes when the doors opened.”

The evacuees were a mix of young and old. One little boy ran toward the maintenance hangar seemingly oblivious to what was going on around him.

At Granholm’s request, the media were kept several hundred yards away from arriving evacuees and were not allowed to interview them.

Several evacuees looked over at a line of television cameras and photographers and waved.

State Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek, said he was amazed at the resiliency of the evacuees he spoke with. He said one man asked him whether there was good fishing “up here.”

“One woman I spoke with said she was feeling relief. She was telling me how last week she had lost her mother and she was thankful that she was OK,” Schauer said.

But there were also horrific tales of what Katrina did to people’s lives.

“One gentleman was talking about the water and the wind and how he was walking through the streets up to his neck in water while dead people were floating by him and dogs and cats were flying by him,” Schauer said.

State looks to county and local governments to offer refugee housing HOW TO HELP The number for the Michigan Hurricane Helpline is (888) 535-6136

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

By TIM MARTIN
Associated Press
and Steve Neavling
Bay City Times Writer

BATTLE CREEK - About 289 evacuees from the New Orleans area left homeless by Hurricane Katrina landed more than 1,000 miles away at a Michigan Air National Guard base on Monday. Officials bused the homeless men, women and children two miles down the road to the nearby Fort Custer Training Center in Augusta. They are expected to stay there for a week or less before they are moved to housing lasting three-to-nine months across the state.

There are no current plans to house any of the evacuees in Bay, Arenac, Huron and Tuscola counties, said Lynn Weaver, director of development for the American Red Cross East Shoreline Chapter in Bay City.

But that could change at any minute, Weaver said.

"We're not anticipating any evacuees at this minute," Weaver said. "We really, truly have no idea yet. We know Battle Creek and Grand Rapids are geared up to help."

If the local Red Cross is asked to help, Weaver said her staff members and volunteers are prepared to shelter the refugees.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said the state is equipped to accept up to 10,000 people evacuated from the Gulf region because of Hurricane Katrina.

The governor is negotiating with about 25 to 30 different county and local governments to arrange the housing and the decisions about where to send people will be made in the coming days, said Liz Boyd, the governor's spokeswoman.

"We really want to marshal our resources," Boyd said.

Kalamazoo Mayor Robert Jones, who greeted evacuees as they arrived Monday, said officials in his city are in the process of doing a community assessment to help them determine where to house evacuees.

"They are welcome to stay as long as they need to," Jones said. "It's a tragedy that they have been through. We want to make sure we get it right here in Michigan."

U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, was also on hand to meet the evacuees. He said that considering what they have been through, the new arrivals looked to be in pretty good shape.

"They seem happy to be here," Schwarz said. "They are now in a place they can get some sleep, get three squares a day, and get their lives back together."

The two Delta Airlines planes carrying the evacuees landed shortly after 5 p.m. at the Battle Creek Air National Guard Base, officials said.

While Fort Custer is taking people, Crawford County's Camp Grayling won't be housing hurricane refugees, at least for now.

"There's been some talk about it, but nothing is definite yet," said Col. Tom Lamie, deputy commander of the training facility.

Lamie said today that Camp Grayling is equipped to house up to 1,000 soldiers, but he doesn't know how many civilian families it could accommodate. Many of the buildings at the camp are unheated, he said.

Lamie said Camp Grayling is sending supplies to Fort Custer.

Granholm said at Monday's annual Labor Day walk across the Mackinac Bridge that she did not expect the arrival of the evacuees to put any strain on the state budget, because she expected the state to be reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

State Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek, said he expected the Legislature to vote this week on appropriating \$3 million to \$4 million that would go toward hurricane relief efforts.

Meanwhile, Saginaw Valley State University would be receptive to helping college students affected by Hurricane Katrina, though the school hasn't been contacted by any students yet, said Timothy Inman, senior communications coordinator at the university.

Inman said there is no specific policy in place for transferring credit hours or tuition that has already been paid at a southern university. He said if the university does hear from students interested in transferring credits or tuition, they would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

"Because it's a tragedy, it's out of their control," Inman said. "We would try to help them anyway that we can."

Michigan is accepting evacuees at a time state services already are strained by budget problems caused by a sluggish economy.

Michigan's unemployment rate, 7 percent in July, was highest among the 50 states. With fewer people working, the state has not collected as much as expected in sales taxes and other revenue to pay for programs.

Michigan has reduced some Medicaid and other health care services for low-income people in recent years. More cuts are possible this year as the state plans a budget for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

Cash-strapped school districts also were preparing for possible new students relocating from the disaster area. In Michigan, that could help finances at the local level. Districts are given a minimum of \$6,700 in state aid per student, and that figure is expected to be higher in the budget year that begins next month.

Times Writer Eric English contributed to this report.

It's our turn to help: Up to 600 evacuees coming to West YMCA

Monday, September 05, 2005

*By Danielle Quisenberry and Pat Shellenbarger
The Grand Rapids Press*

GRAND RAPIDS -- An unused recreation facility in Grand Rapids -- 1,000 miles and 16 hours away from the areas demolished by Hurricane Katrina -- seems an unlikely haven for hundreds of displaced storm victims.

But unlike the waterlogged streets of New Orleans and wreckage in Mississippi, the West Side YMCA is safe and dry. And it will be ready for those in need, said Lisa Marks, chief executive officer of the American Red Cross for west-central Michigan.

"Just because we're in Grand Rapids doesn't mean we won't be part of the disaster response," she said.

The YMCA, 902 Leonard St. NW, closed since July after the opening of the David D. Hunting YMCA, is being prepared for up to 600 people left homeless and desperate by the storm.

"These people have been through a terrible tragedy and they are going to need love and support, and we want to provide that," Marks said.

Whatever they see when they get here will be better "than the feces of the Superdome," said Grand Rapids Police Officer Dave Johnston, who was stationed at the YMCA Sunday.

The local Red Cross was coordinating several government and private agencies awaiting the arrival of the refugees. In less than 48 hours, the Red Cross, Grand Rapids police and fire departments, Kent County Sheriff's Department, local hospitals, the Salvation Army and county medical and mental-health agencies put together a plan to house and feed the refugees.

The group expects to provide not only housing, but clothing, food and personal hygiene products as well as medical and mental-health services, said Mayor George Heartwell. Heartwell told Gov. Jennifer Granholm that Grand Rapids can house up to 1,000 refugees.

Granholm has committed the state to receive up to 10,000. How soon they will begin arriving remained uncertain Sunday, although the first group of 500 was expected to fly into Fort Custer near Battle Creek by today.

Granholm was at the Fort Custer Training Center Sunday for a walk-through before evacuees arrived.

"Michigan is prepared and ready to receive our fellow citizens," she said.

The refugees will be housed at Fort Custer for three to seven days before being bused to communities throughout Michigan, said Liz Boyd, Granholm's press secretary.

They could arrive in Grand Rapids by Wednesday or Thursday, Heartwell predicted.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency told state officials to expect 500 refugees as early as Sunday, but by late in the day, none had arrived.

"We're in a holding pattern. It may be we're experiencing what everyone else is experiencing with FEMA," said Boyd, a reference to complaints the agency had been slow to act.

When the refugees do come to Grand Rapids, the YMCA will be prepared, Marks said.

Marks said about 40 volunteers, rotating through four-hour shifts, will be needed to run what they call "the Red Cross House."

On Sunday, the smell of cleaning agents used on the carpets and floors lingered. In only a day, all the old equipment and aging day-care toys were removed.

"You wouldn't have recognized this place yesterday," said Don McCarthy, chief operating officer for the YMCA of greater Grand Rapids.

"This is spectacular," said Dan Johnson, a volunteer from Grand Rapids who was assembling cots. "It is good to see people doing what the government should have."

Molli and Jennie VanderJagt, sisters-in-law working in their dress clothes, had come from Seventh Reformed Church, which is across Widdicomb Avenue NW from the makeshift shelter.

"Money can only go so far. It's the actual help they need," said Molli VanderJagt, of Kentwood, stretching cot canvas over metal rods.

This is the disaster hitting home, said Jennie VanderJagt, of Belmont.

"It really shows just how far the effects of this thing span," said Kent County Sheriff's Sgt. Roger Zoppa, who was stationed at the YMCA Sunday.

Once the refugees are in town, the police and the sheriff's department each will station three officers at the Red Cross House. They then will determine whether the house will require more or less law enforcement. Grand Rapids Public Schools, the Salvation Army and area restaurants will provide food for the refugees. The school district earlier said it would accept evacuees into its classrooms.

Heartwell said the refugees will stay at the West Side YMCA only as long as necessary before moving to rental apartments and houses.

The city may open a couple of other temporary shelters if needed, he said.

Heartwell was asking Granholm to help cut red tape, allowing the refugees to receive vouchers for federally subsidized rent.

"We certainly hope it will not be long that we can move people into a normalized living environment," he said. "We want to make sure they get quickly incorporated into the life of the community."

Plan to bus Katrina survivors from La. to Lansing hits snag

LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Three Lansing buses that left Saturday for Louisiana to bring supplies to Hurricane Katrina victims made it safely to Baton Rouge on Sunday and unloaded.

But the plan to bring hurricane victims back to Lansing on the return trip ran into an unknown snag as of late Sunday night, said Joe Brown, general manager of Dean Trailways of Michigan, the motorcoach charter company that supplied the three, 55-passenger buses.

"They have been delayed," Brown said.

"I don't know what the delay is, and the drivers don't know what the delay is."

He said the earliest the buses could return is early evening today.

"And that's a best-case scenario," he added.

He said the buses might not make it back until sometime Tuesday.

The buses hope to bring about 150 displaced people — mostly women and children and the elderly — to Lansing to stay in recently closed Lansing schools.

Michigan State Police makes historic journey

For the first time in its history, Michigan State Police are being deployed to another state to provide assistance.

The troopers, along with other Michigan law enforcement officers, including some from the



TONY RICHARDS/For the Lansing State Journal

Gearing up for Louisiana: Lt. Linda Copeland Morgan, a Michigan conservation officer, gets an immunization shot as part of her preparation for deployment to Louisiana for the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.

"I don't know what the delay is, and the drivers don't know what the delay is."

Joe Brown
Dean Trailways of Michigan
general manager

Meridian Township and Lansing police departments, were expected to leave at 8 a.m. today for Louisiana, where they will help local agencies respond to Hurricane Katrina's aftermath.

Their presence was requested by the state of Louisiana through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

They will be deployed for a minimum of 14 days, and will meet up with command officers from the Michigan State Police who left Sunday afternoon.

State, county and local officers representing 22 agencies will be part of the deployment. It includes a six-member Emergency Support Team, a mobile command vehicle with communications capability and a National Guard transport vehicle with enough supplies to sustain the officers for four days.

They planned to depart from the Michigan State Police Training Academy in Windsor Township where they received immunizations and were briefed on the trip.

How to help State/national

► **The state Web site,** www.michigan.gov, has information about how to help hurricane victims.

► **To donate nonmonetary items,** call the Michigan Hurricane Helpline at (888) 535-6136. It is staffed from 7 a.m. to midnight daily.

► **American Red Cross:** Go to www.redcross.org or call (800) HELP-NOW (435-7669). The Lansing Mall Guest Service Center will serve as a fund collection site for the Red Cross.

► **Salvation Army:** www.salvationarmyusa.org or call (800) SAL-ARMY (725-2769)

► **To help pets and other animals displaced, injured or homeless as a result of the hurricane.** The Humane Society of the United States, www.hsus.org or (888) 259-5431; or the American Veterinary Medical Foundation, www.avmf.org or (800) 248-2862, ext. 6689

Local efforts

COLLECTIONS

► **The 95 parishes of the Catholic Diocese of Lansing** will collect donations to forward to Catholic Charities USA. Donations may be dropped off at churches or sent to Hurricane Relief 2005, Diocese of Lansing, 300 W. Ottawa St., Lansing, MI 48933.

TO HELP

REFUGEES LOCALLY

► **Several churches** are collecting items for refugees expected to arrive today and later this month. Donations such as toothpaste, clothing, bottled

water, nonperishable food and diapers may be dropped off at the following churches:

► **New Mount Calvary Baptist Church,** 3800 W. Miller Road

► **Pentecostal Outreach Church of God in Christ,** 2645 W. Holmes Road

► **St. Stephen's Community Church,** 1420 W. Oakland Ave.

► **Central United Methodist Church,** 215 N. Capitol Ave.

► **First Presbyterian Church,** 510 W. Ottawa St.

For more information, call 484-2180 or 485-9477.

VIGIL

► **Michigan State University** will hold a candlelight vigil at 7 p.m. Wednesday "so the community can come together in a visible way to support the victims of the hurricane," President Lou Anna Simon said. The location has not been announced.

FUNDRAISERS

► **Dimondale Lions** will have a chicken BBQ/street dance from 4:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday at the Dimondale Lions Club. For more information, call 646-6139.

► **Lansing Community College Student Nurses Association** will sponsor a bake sale from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday in classroom 005 of the Health and Human Services building.

► **Trinity United Methodist Church** will hold a pig roast on Sunday. For info, call 627-8388.

Send us your plans

► **If you or your group** plan events to help the hurricane victims, contact the Lansing State Journal at 377-1112 or metro@lsj.com.

Churches, families must open homes to evacuees

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Editorial

The Granholm administration made a generous offer to displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina: Come to Michigan and we'll provide housing and education.

The first wave of evacuees came to Battle Creek on Monday. Some who witnessed the arrival of these hurricane survivors said they will never forget the sight.

The outpouring of support for them is gratifying -- and it's manifesting itself in many ways.

For example, through the efforts of the Michigan Legislative Black Caucus, a group of 20 black state lawmakers, three donated buses left Michigan Friday, bound for Baton Rouge, La., loaded with supplies. The buses are expected to return to Michigan carrying between 100 and 125 hurricane evacuees, who will be housed in empty schools in Detroit and Lansing.

That's a nice gesture. But placing Katrina's victims in empty schools with nothing to do, no jobs and no friends or family for support, may offer a solution for a week. It could be months before Gulf Coast residents, especially those in New Orleans, will be able to return home.

We recall another crisis of dislocated people -- Vietnamese fleeing their country after Saigon fell to the communists -- in the 1970s. Churches around the nation stepped up to help displaced Vietnamese people start new lives in the United States.

Now churches are being asked to help perform a similar service again. A church can adopt a displaced family, help provide decent temporary housing, get children enrolled in local schools, help adults find employment -- although we concede that, in Michigan's job climate, jobs for displaced people will not be easy to come by.

Americans have already seen they can't wait for government to take care of the problem.

Thousands of hungry, thirsty, sick New Orleans residents were trapped in the submerged city with little or no help from the government. It is clear this long-term evacuee crisis must be solved by private initiative.

Many families in Michigan are willing to open their homes to people displaced by the hurricane. And we have no doubt that they will be welcomed with open arms here.

Michigan will allow past allegations in sex offense cases

9/4/2005, 7:57 a.m. ET

By DAVID EGGERT
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — It is a staple of criminal law that a defendant's past behavior is generally off limits during trial.

The reasoning is that jurors should not convict someone for being a "bad guy" but instead base their decision on evidence in the case before them.

But an exception would be made in cases involving alleged sexual crimes against children under legislation that has unanimously passed the Legislature and that Gov. Jennifer Granholm has said she will sign.

Supporters say sex offenders have a compulsion to rape or molest again, citing recent high-profile abductions and killings of children in Florida and Idaho.

Prosecutors say the measure would help jurors receive all the relevant information — including a defendant's background and character — to ensure that guilty people are convicted.

"Especially when it comes to sex offenses, history is a big predictor of the future," said Sen. Alan Cropsey, a DeWitt Republican and lawyer who is sponsoring the proposed rule change.

But opponents, mainly defense lawyers, think the change will lead to horrible results.

"You're basically going to convict everybody charged, or darn close to that," said F. Martin Tieber, past president of the Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan. "There are a lot of false allegations in criminal sexual conduct cases."

The bill, also sponsored by Republican Rep. David Law of West Bloomfield, is part of a multi-bill package aimed at preventing sex offenders from getting near children in schools and day care centers.

It would amend Michigan's court rules in cases where defendants are accused of sex crimes against youths under age 18. Prosecutors could introduce testimony that a defendant had committed another sex offense against a minor — including offenses for which the defendant was neither charged nor convicted.

The new rule resembles federal court rules, enacted 10 years ago, that allow prior conduct to be admitted in child molestation and sexual assault trials. Backers routinely cite the federal policy as a reason for making the change.

But practically speaking, sex crimes are rarely prosecuted at the federal level, leading detractors to argue that a rule change will be quite drastic in Michigan. At least one other state, California, has a similar rule.

"You're adding more people to our prison system who probably didn't commit the particular crime they're charged with even though they may have done bad things in the past," Tieber said. By allowing past behavior to be used as character evidence there is a classic danger of unfairness, he said. Past behavior already can be used in limited circumstances to show motive or intent, but that's not the same as character evidence, he said.

Tieber noted that jurors think the defendant is probably guilty if he has a propensity to act criminally. The question should be, "Did the defendant molest his accuser?" But it becomes, "Is the defendant a child molester?"

Add in the reality that many people are naturally repelled by charges of sexual conduct against vulnerable children, and the defendant is in trouble, Tieber said.

But prosecutors point to California as proof that jurors can be fair. There, a jury heard past allegations that pop star Michael Jackson molested or had designs on five other boys. They found him not guilty in the case before them.

"Juries will put the evidence in the context that is deserved," Livingston County Prosecutor David Morse said. "As a rule, I have confidence in the intelligence and wisdom of the jury."

Morse, who pushed for the rule change on behalf of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, noted that just because evidence can be introduced doesn't mean a judge will allow it. He also said prosecutors are at a disadvantage in sex-related cases involving minors because children's memories are not as developed as adults, and they can be reluctant to testify, especially against family members.

"For a full examination of the truth, you ought to be able to take in the context of a person's past behavior to explain current behavior," Morse said. "Among the most egregious crimes are sex offenses against children."

David Eggert can be reached at [deggert\(at\)ap.org](mailto:deggert(at)ap.org)

The evidence bills are Senate Bill 608 and House Bill 4937.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Criminal Defense Attorneys of Michigan: <http://www.cdam.net>

Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan: <http://www.michiganprosecutor.org>

Sunday, September 4, 2005

Police purged teachers' prints

New laws require all educators, school workers be fingerprinted again; who will pay is unknown.

By Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News

Thousands of teachers and other school employees may have to be re-fingerprinted after lawmakers learned that the State Police purged more than a decade's worth of fingerprint records used for background checks.

Although the teachers have already paid \$54 for their fingerprints and criminal history checks as a condition of their hiring, they may have to pay again, and this time it could cost up to \$70 for new digital prints that will be stored in a State Police database.

Al Short, director of government affairs for the Michigan Education Association, said he learned of the State Police policies of purging prints Wednesday after a committee meeting in Lansing where lawmakers were considering legislation to protect children from sex offenders in the classroom.

"People have previously paid for fingerprints to get a job, and you've tossed them!" an astounded Short said. "And now we are going to require (teachers) to pay \$70 to get a fingerprint they already had taken and paid for ... No. That's not going to happen."

Last week, lawmakers passed many of the finishing touches on a package of bills known as the Student Safety Initiative that was prompted by a Detroit News investigation into teachers convicted of sex crimes. The laws will expand background checks for school employees and require regular criminal history checks by the State Police to ensure employees haven't gotten in trouble.

But after learning the fingerprints of teachers and school employees had been thrown away, lawmakers had to make last-minute changes to the legislation. School districts will have until July 1, 2008, to make sure all full- and part-time employees are fingerprinted, regardless of whether they had prints taken in the past. Who will pay for these fingerprints is not included in the legislation.

"When we found those records were not on file, we did an amended bill ... and allowed school districts a two-year period of time to collect fingerprints," said Matt Resch, director of communications for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R- Novi, who has been pushing these bills. The state likely won't pay, he said. School districts could pay for them or pass the costs along to the employees.

Previous Report

State fails to stop teacher sex abuse
Student Safety Initiative

- Requires all full- and part-time school employees to have criminal background checks
- Prohibits convicted sex offenders from living, working or loitering within 1,000 feet of school
- Allows evidence of prior child molestation and sexual assault to be admissible in court
- Requires school employees to self-report to the school within three days if they have been arrested

Source: Michigan Legislature

It shouldn't be a secret that the State Police purged the fingerprints, said Shanon Akans, spokeswoman for the department. When background checks for teachers became mandatory in 1993, school employees were concerned about privacy, she said.

"There were worries that it has a Big Brother type aspect if the State Police were keeping these fingerprints on file of people who didn't have criminal histories," she said.

"We did what people wanted," by throwing the prints away after the background checks were completed, Akans said.

School districts, already embattled by beleaguered budgets, say they can't afford to pay for all their employees to be re-fingerprinted.

"I can't imagine our staff would be at all happy about it," said Frank Ruggirello, spokesman for Plymouth-Canton Community Schools. "We have a total of 3,000 full- and part-time employees ... that would equate to another \$210,000."

The cost at Dearborn would be around \$175,000, said David Mustonen, spokesman for Dearborn schools, which has been telling its new hires to get the digital prints this year since the State Police signed a contract with a private fingerprinting company to launch the new fingerprint database.

"That's pretty substantial considering tight financial times school districts have been under," Mustonen said.

Since the 1993-94 school year, teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, nurses, social workers, school psychologists and bus drivers have been required by law to have their fingerprints checked with state and FBI databases for criminal convictions. The new laws would expand the checks to include all other full- or part-time school employees, such as janitors, cafeteria workers and coaches.

Today, technology has allowed school employees to be distinguished from common criminals, the State Police's Akans said. Under a new system to be complete this fall, the State Police will have two digital fingerprint databases: one for criminals and one for applicants for a dozen positions for which the state requires background checks, such as school employees and concealed weapons permit holders.

If a teacher is arrested for a crime and fingerprinted, law enforcement would be alerted that he or she is a school employee, when the system is up and running, Akans said. Police then would notify the school district.

The legislation, which Gov. Jennifer Granholm supports, would also prevent sex offenders from working, loitering and living within 1,000 feet of schools.

You can reach Marisa Schultz at (313) 222-2310 or mschultz@detnews.com.

Teacher given more time to consider deal in sexual conduct case

Monday, September 5, 2005

By Scott Davis

BAY CITY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

CARO - A 27-year-old teacher accused of a sexual affair with an eighth-grade student has some additional time to consider a plea to avoid prison.

Tuscola County Prosecutor Mark E. Reese has agreed to extend a deadline that expired Wednesday to give Kristen A. Margrif more time to decide whether to plead to a deal likely resulting in a year in jail.

Reese said Margrif's attorney, M. Allen Robb of Flint, requested the extension last week.

"The defense wants additional time to review all the evidence and information contained in the (police) report," Reese said. "We don't want a lengthy delay, of course. We have every incentive to get this resolved quickly. The victim is waiting. It isn't easy on anyone."

As a result, authorities postponed Margrif's preliminary examination, which was scheduled for last Friday before District Judge Kim D. Glaspie. Reese said a new hearing is not set, but he did not anticipate a delay of more than two weeks.

Times News Service could not reach Margrif's attorney for comment.

On Aug. 10, District Magistrate Joe Van Auken arraigned Margrif on seven counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct - a 15-year felony - and one misdemeanor fourth-degree count.

Margrif, an English teacher at Kingston High School, is accused of having trysts with the male student in her car and inside a resale shop called Nana's Attic, at M-24 and M-46 - where the pupil worked - in June and July.

Reese offered to allow Margrif to plead guilty to three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. As part of the deal, prosecutors would not oppose a judge capping her sentence to one year in jail and four years of probation.

Authorities say Margrif admitted the four-week affair to her husband and eventually to a family pastor, who was forced by state law to inform police of a possible crime against a minor.

School officials have said they will not take disciplinary action against Margrif until there is a conviction.

Margrif, who lives in Mayville, is free on a \$45,000 personal recognizance bond.

Death of abused children ought to strengthen public's resolve to intervene

Saturday, September 03, 2005

Editorial

The Grand Rapids Press

About 350 children are suspected victims of abuse and neglect every day in Michigan. The recent deaths of two Grand Rapids toddlers, who were beaten in their homes, put names and faces on abstract child abuse statistics for area residents. The tragedies should inspire everyone to redouble their efforts to ensure vulnerable children are protected. Child abuse is not a private family matter. It's everybody's business.

One of the first lines of defense for abused and neglected children should be a caring community -- people concerned enough to intervene or contact authorities when they suspect a child is in danger. Outsiders intervened, to no avail, in the two recent Grand Rapids tragedies. That ought not discourage intervention, but strengthen community resolve to combat and prevent such abuse.

The deaths last month of 2-year-old Aiyana Cisneros and Armon Colar, also 2, are both attributed to blunt force trauma. Aiyana suffered multiple blows to her chest and abdomen, which caused internal bleeding. An autopsy showed Armon died of multiple blows as well. His mother's 17-year-old boyfriend is being held without bond on a felony murder charge in the case. No one has been charged yet in Aiyana's death, but the girl's mother and boyfriend were in the home when the child was injured and have been interviewed by police.

The two deaths are all the more maddening because intervention efforts failed to save the youngsters. Police investigated a complaint of possible abuse several weeks before Aiyana died when emergency room doctors found a bruise near the girl's pelvis. The child was returned to her mother after police and protective services workers found no evidence of abuse. In Armon's case, a neighbor made repeated attempts to contact protective service officials to report possible abuse the night before and on the morning he was hospitalized with fatal injuries. One number she called listed in the telephone directory for child abuse and neglect service was out of service.

County officials are working to have that bogus listing removed. Until it is, state officials are working to have calls to that exchange electronically transferred to the local child protective services office. That switch should be completed as soon as possible. There shouldn't be any obstacles to reporting suspected abuse.

Though children of all ages are victims, younger children bear the brunt of it. Many of them are too young to protect themselves or tell others of their plight. National statistics show that children under age four are victims of nearly 80 percent of abuse and neglect, most of it at the hands of parents. Information compiled by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System showed parents are the perpetrators in 80 percent of the cases.

Last year, Michigan officials investigated 73,920 abuse and neglect complaints -- nearly 17,600 were confirmed. Almost 3,600 of those complaints were filed in Kent County and just over 1,300 were substantiated. Those numbers show that child abuse prevention is everybody's business. Citizens who suspect abuse must get involved and not take the attitude that someone else will report it. Protective services workers must be aggressive in investigating allegations. Health care providers, social workers, teachers and police who are required by law to report all suspected child abuse and neglect cases must diligently do so. Certainly, not every suspicion or accusation of abuse turns out to be true, but each deserves attention from professionals trained to make that call. It's better to err on the side of making a complaint than not when children's lives are at stake.

Child care workers seek parity

Monday, September 5, 2005

By Jane C. Parikh

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A job that, with little argument, is one of the most important that anyone hires to have done, is one that has never been for people who want big financial rewards.

The job of caring for other people's children requires endless patience and a real love of children, said Ella Ryder, executive director of Kalamazoo-based Child Care Resources.

But relative to other careers, it remains undervalued, she said, making it, for many of those involved, a labor of love.

Nationally the average pay for a childcare worker is about \$17,830 per year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. A preschool teacher makes an average of \$23,940 per year. A kindergarten teacher, who would have the same educational background as many childcare providers, makes about \$44,000 per year.

"Our society sees child-care providers as simply babysitters," said Ryder, whose non-profit organization advocates for quality child care through the training and support of child-care providers. "We don't respect them even though we give them a lot of lip service."

But that may change.

Bringing wages in line with the responsibilities of child care workers is the focus of an effort by AFSCME to organize state-licensed child-care providers.

"After years of silence, many childcare providers throughout the state are trying to build a relationship with the state of Michigan in terms of reimbursement, professionalization of the industry and having a real voice and respect in terms of their relationship with the state," said Boyd McCamish, area organizing director for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees in Detroit.

Increased wages would start with providers who look after children whose parents are clients of the Department of Human Services. Ryder said the state is still using 1997 reimbursement rates. The average child-care provider in Detroit can, for instance, expect to make a minimum of \$1.88 per hour per child for that service and a maximum of \$2.50.

McCamish said raising the state reimbursement levels is a critical part of AFSCME's organizing effort.

For providers who are not reimbursed by the state, the union wants to elevate the profile of the work they do and establish affordable health care plans as well as push for an increase in pay rates.

"These are folks who normally work 12- to 14-hour days and they have no access to health care or other benefits," McCamish said. "They do it because they sincerely care about children, but there are a lot easier ways to make money."

Ryder said there are about 1,700 licensed child-care providers in the eight-county area served by Child Care Resources (Barry, Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties). They join a total of 35,000 providers statewide, Ryder said.

"It is an everyday job and you constantly have to think about what you're doing and go with the learning moments when they present themselves and build on them," said Sherry VanMaaren of Parchment.

A child-care provider for about eight years, and owner of Sherry's Daycare, she said she tries to provide a structured atmosphere for the eight children in her care that emphasizes learning through a variety of activities.

She charges \$130 a week per child and \$30 per day on a part-time basis, which augments her husband's full-time salary. While that may seem like a decent income, it decreases rapidly she says when she deducts her overhead costs -- such as taxes and expenses for food and materials for the children in her care.

"After everything was taken out, I only made \$10,000 last year," VanMaaren said.

Ann Brown, executive director of the Learning Village, which has three Kalamazoo area locations, said she entered the profession 27 years ago and has had very few regrets about her decision. But she said, "I could make more money in many other careers."

"The center directors and the direct care staff are not paid what they're really worth for the work they do," Brown said. "But people go into (childcare) knowing that."

Staff members of the Learning Village's three locations make \$25,000 to \$30,000 per year.

"You couldn't be a single parent and do this for a living," Brown said. "We all do it because we think what we do is worthwhile."

Sharon Visser, who is licensed to care for six children in her Vicksburg home, said the birth of her daughter almost two years ago -- rather than money -- prompted her to open her childcare business. She said her fee scale is \$135 per week for infants to 18 months and \$125 for children 18 months and older.

"I enjoy working with children and I'm happy being at home with my kids and I really have taken steps to make this a career for me," Visser said.

But she and VanMaaren said they're not sure how being part of AFSCME would benefit them.

"From what I've read, the unions will make efforts to negotiate with states to increase subsidies and get some kind of health insurance. And being able to get affordable health insurance would be important to me," Visser said. "But I'm not going to join a union."

Brown said if unions could bolster the message that child care has been strengthened and improved that would be a huge help to child care providers in terms of raising their chosen profession in the eyes of society in general. Other than that, she said she's not sure what other positive outcomes would result from AFSCME's involvement.

VanMaaren and Visser both said they think they are taken seriously by the parents who employ them and don't need union representation. They said they understand the financial sacrifice many families make to have their children in quality child care settings.

Ryder said the average annual cost of childcare in the Southwest Michigan area is about \$7,000 a year.

VanMaaren said she's been on both sides -- as a working parent and now a provider.

"When my daughter came along I was thankful that my family was there, but I still had to pay them," VanMaaren said. "There's not a lot coming in for me, but there's a lot going out for the parents."

Child support ruling stands

Saturday, September 03, 2005

SCOTT DAVIS

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Once again, Jason Richardson has won a referee's call in his ongoing child support battle with his former girlfriend.

Friday, Saginaw County Circuit Court Family Division Judge Patrick J. McGraw denied a request by Roshonda Jacqmain of Saginaw to reconsider his ruling setting the support paid by Richardson to their 5-year-old daughter.

Richardson is a Saginaw native and star guard/forward with the National Basketball Association's Golden State Warriors.

"I believe the court followed the law and made the appropriate decision," said Richard S. Victor, Richardson's Southfield-based attorney. "I'm happy the matter is now resolved. It will be up to (Jacqmain) to take it to the Court of Appeals." Brian S. Makaric, Jacqmain's Saginaw Township-based attorney, said his client had not yet decided whether to appeal. He declined further comment, saying he had not yet read McGraw's ruling.

McGraw ordered Richardson on Aug. 11 to pay \$7,000 a month in child support for his daughter. Jacqmain sought \$45,426 a month.

Makaric maintained McGraw erred in his ruling, claiming the judge failed to specify the effective date of his decision and that he improperly deviated from the Michigan Child Support Formula.

In his written opinion Friday, McGraw said his past ruling is effective Aug. 11 -- the date he signed it -- and he added that he didn't believe he improperly departed from state guidelines. Makaric also maintained McGraw improperly ordered Richardson to place \$100,000 annually in a trust for his daughter, continuing to the end of his six-year NBA contract.

McGraw, however, maintained that only Richardson -- not his former girlfriend -- had legal standing to challenge the trust.

"It is reprehensible that the plaintiff would move to terminate benefits ordered by this court for the benefit of her minor child," McGraw wrote, "which clearly were not ordered to be paid from her funds nor from monies she would have any control over." Makaric declined to respond.

Victor said Richardson did not plan to appeal McGraw's ruling on the trust. "We believe the judge correctly was looking at the child's best interests," Victor said.

In his Aug. 11 ruling, McGraw also ordered Richardson to continue to place \$1,000 a month in a conservatorship account. Payments to that account will end when the girl is 18 or graduates from high school.

Moreover, the judge ordered Richardson to pay for the child's health care needs.

In 2000, McGraw ordered Richardson to pay \$8 a week in child support for his daughter, and a year later, he signed a contract with the Golden State Warriors, starting with an annual salary of \$2.4 million.

In August 2001, McGraw increased the support payment to \$2,000 monthly, and later set it at \$4,000, which Richardson paid until the Aug. 11 ruling.

Jacqmain's recent support request was prompted partly by Richardson's signing of a six-year contract with his team, boosting his salary next season to \$8.9 million, court records state. That salary rises annually to \$14.4 million in 2010, records indicate. Citing the increase, Jacqmain was seeking \$73,048 in monthly child support payments that year.

Scott Davis is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9665.

Deadbeat parents pay up

Editorial

The Grand Rapids Press

Tuesday, September 06, 2005

Michigan parents who fail to pay child support are hurting their children's future and that of the state. This fall the Michigan Department of Human Services is offering an amnesty program that allows parents who owe back payments to catch-up without fear of prosecution. This is a great opportunity for them to fulfill their responsibility to their children. No priority should be higher than the welfare of their children.

The amnesty program begins Oct. 1 and ends Dec. 31. Under the program, a person who owes child support can pay without the threat of criminal or civil penalties. A request form with at least half of the owed child support must be filed with the local Friend of the Court office.

Parents must pay the rest before the end of the year. People cannot apply after a felony warrant is issued for nonpayment. Current support payments that go toward such things as feeding and housing their children are not effected.

The state has more than 610,000 overdue child support cases and in excess of \$8 billion is owed the state and custodial parents. In Kent County, deadbeat parents owe more than \$387 million dollars. John Cole, Kent County's friend of the court, said most people are not shirking their responsibility. Sixty to 65 percent are paying.

However, the delinquents are a drain on the state, which is forced to support their children who end up on welfare and Medicaid rolls. Child support laws exist to provide economic security for children and the parent raising them. The idea is to prevent single-parent families from entering the welfare system and a cycle of poverty that is hard to escape.

This summer, similarly structured amnesty programs which ran for just two weeks were deemed successful for Washington, D.C., and Maryland. Maryland collected more than \$500,000 and Washington more than \$200,000.

The timeline for the Michigan amnesty program won't work for every one. But those overdue should still arrange a payment plan. People physically and mentally able to work should be making at least modest payments that can benefit their children. The Office of the Friend of the Court reviews incomes. In Kent County, those unemployed can even participate in a job training program. The state does not want to lock people up. No money is made for children by doing that. Jailing becomes just another cost.

Delinquent parents should stop making excuses and start sacrificing to fulfill their financial obligations. The amnesty opportunity is a good chance to make amends. Money is not the only benefit. Parents who contribute financially are more likely to be involved in their children's lives in other ways. Their children and the state will be better off if that happens.

search, learn the facts and, for the sake of her adoptive children, try to be a good, loving, non-judgmental parent.

We have a rich culture and heritage that they deserve to know about.

7/3

Dawn Campbell
Lansing

Judgment denied

I found Carol Carlson's Aug. 18 letter simplistic, insulting and inflammatory. Since when does "children of color" only mean black? Adopting black children does not make Carlson an expert on all things black.

The idea that black women to think that a government check can replace a parent is ridiculous. Does Carlson know how small a "welfare" check is? Poverty is not color specific. More whites are below the poverty lines, yet more black children are removed from their homes and put into foster care.

Why is that? I suspect that if workers shared Carlson's attitude we'd have uncovered a major reason. Carlson should do some re-

Published September 4, 2005

Battle Creek home provides a haven for troubled women

Year-old program celebrates success, prepares to expand

By Linda Jo Scott
Special to the State Journal

BATTLE CREEK - When Grace Cowens saw a run-down former drug house in the Roosevelt neighborhood two years ago, she didn't say it should be torn down. Instead, Cowens had a vision for the house becoming a haven for women who are struggling to get their lives back on track.

She imagined a safe house to protect women from abusive relationships or from contact with pimps or drug dealers.

On Aug. 18, 75 people celebrated the first birthday of Cowens' successful dream. Celebrants - including most of the year's first eight residents - gathered in the cheery, sun-lit house.

The Battle Creek house contains three double bedrooms, a homey kitchen, an extra room for meetings and storage, two full baths and a staff kitchen.

Cowens said she is no stranger to family problems; she serves as the detention supervisor for Battle Creek Public Schools.

"A significant percent of the children are affected by substance abuse, domestic violence and homelessness issues," she said. "I felt like the best way to help the children was to help their parents."

Cowens said the women work together on chores and give each other support. But most importantly, Gracious Homes gives the women up to 12 months of help.

"They have time to get their lives together. Shelters usually give them between 30 and 60 days, but we give them a full year," she said.

Cowens said the goal is to have three homes for 18 women.

"A second home is currently under way, which will accommodate up to six additional women," she said.

Sherry Thompson, a former resident, said living at Gracious Homes taught her valuable lessons and how to set goals.

"I can accept criticism now without crying," Thompson said. "I feel stronger in handling not wanting to drink, and I have also learned to adapt to living with other women."

Cynthia Davis, 38, a current resident, is grateful to Gracious Homes and to Cowens for giving her a second chance.

"I got into some trouble with the law and got two years probation," she said. "I've been sober for seven months now, and I'm taking my GED classes."

Once homeless, Davis has made great strides. She helps with lunches at the Salvation Army because at Gracious Homes, women who are not employed are required to do community service.

Cowens said she believes in supporting others, which is why she chose the Gracious Homes motto: "Helping hands helping people to achieve obtainable goals one step at a time."

Linda Jo Scott is a freelance writer.

Follow sleep rules to protect our infants

Ingham Co. sees preventable deaths among newborns

Imagine the profound tragedy of waking one morning to find your baby dead in your bed. Or, after putting your baby down for a brief nap on the couch, you return to find your baby listless and not breathing, wedged between the back of the couch and the couch cushion.

Unimaginable, but a reality all too often.

The Lansing State Journal did a service to our community by reporting recently on the issue of infant safe sleep practices. This is an issue of growing interest in the medical and public health communities and one that shows considerable promise in lowering our infant mortality rate.

Historical data suggest that approximately 24 babies born in Ingham County this year will die before they reach their first birthday. We estimate that at

least 20 percent of these deaths will occur because babies were put to sleep in an unsafe environment.

These deaths can be prevented!

The Capital Area Infant Safe Sleep Coalition, comprised of multiple agencies and concerned citizens in our community, has issued the following safe sleep guidelines to prevent infant deaths from unsafe sleep.

A safe sleep environment is one in which:

- ▶ The baby sleeps by him or herself in a crib, portable crib or bassinet.
- ▶ A firm mattress with a tightly fitted sheet is used (no loose bedding).
- ▶ The baby is always put to sleep on his or her back, even when he or she can roll over.
- ▶ Nothing but the baby is in



DR. DEAN SIENKO

is Ingham County Health Department medical director and county medical examiner.

the sleep area (no pillows, blankets, comforters, stuffed animals, or other soft items).

▶ The baby is not dressed too warmly (the baby is dressed in as much or as little clothing as you are wearing).

▶ The baby's face is uncovered during sleep for easy breathing (use a sleeper instead of a blanket).

▶ No one smokes anything near the baby (not in the house, car, or anywhere a baby is present).

I cannot stress attention to these guidelines strongly enough. Virtually every other month, as the Ingham County medical examiner, a death comes across my desk that is related to unsafe sleep practices. Everyone who cares for a baby, whether they be a parent, sitter, grandparent or child-care provider, must know and follow these guidelines.

A baby's death is a devastating personal and community tragedy. This is especially so when the cause of death is preventable. Always put a baby to sleep in a safe environment.

With our collective attention to the safe sleep guidelines above, we can halt the occurrence of these preventable infant deaths.

L S J 9/3

Comprehensive sex education

The Grand Rapids Press

Letters to the Editor

September 6, 2005

This is in response to Judy Celano's letter ("Abstinence is effective," Press, Aug. 12). If only it were that easy. Kids are exposed to more information than that from their parents or from abstinence-only programs, for example, soap operas, video games, movies, magazines, and music that drip with examples of poor sexuality decision-making and high risk behavior. Because of this, kids need accurate and appropriately complete information to help them navigate the nightmare of misinformation, peer pressure, and strong hormonal urges. When information is incomplete, kids are at higher risk for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancies, and emotional distress. Extensive research shows that kids who receive abstinence-only education do postpone sexual intercourse for six to 18 months longer than kids who did not. However, when they did engage in premarital sex, they were less likely to use contraceptives and condoms, more likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection, and less likely to seek testing and treatment. This increases the possibility of transmitting infections to others and increases their risk of unintended pregnancies. Sadly, teens who took pledges to postpone intercourse until marriage were more likely to engage in both oral and anal sex than their non-pledging peers -- four to six times more likely. Since 1997, the federal government has spent almost \$700 million on abstinence-only-until-marriage programs while ignoring the ineffective and unsafe outcomes of those very programs. Comprehensive education about sexuality that includes accurate information about abstinence, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections have been found to be effective in delaying the onset of intercourse, reducing the number of sexual partners, increasing contraceptive and condom use among our adolescent -- as well as decreasing unintended pregnancies. Please, let us look at the entire picture of risk and the full need for education to facilitate more effective decision-making in our children.

GAYLA D. JEWEL

A recovery of reading

Tuesday, September 06, 2005

Jackson Citizen Patriot Editorial

Friends of early-childhood education have touted for years the benefits of the Reading Recovery program. Now, after a lapse of funding, the program is being rejuvenated -- thanks to some encouraging incentives offered by the Jackson County Intermediate School District.

The Reading Recovery program features one-on-one tutoring by specialists trained in the program. It is so highly regarded in education circles that the state provided funding for the program in better times. However, local districts were forced to cut back due to tight budgets two years ago.

Now the ISD is offering local districts an incentive either to take on new Reading Recovery teachers or to retain the ones they have. The districts will get \$20,000 for each new teacher, and \$10,000 for retaining existing teachers.

Granted, Reading Recovery is expensive because it focuses so much of one professional's attention on a limited number of children. However, those children do learn how to read, and the ability to read pays dividends throughout a child's education. Area districts' fourth-grade MEAP scores reflect that. Nine of the 12 public-school districts' reading scores met or exceeded the state average last year, compared with none in 1998.

Three districts -- Jackson and Northwest, plus Paragon Charter Academy -- are bringing back Reading Recovery teachers to tutor their first-graders. They had dropped the program previously. We look for good things to come from this renewed focus on reading. Kudos to the ISD for its incentives and encouragement to the districts.

The Jackson Citizen Patriot

Gardeners help fill need at food banks

Agencies encourage growers to donate surplus vegetables

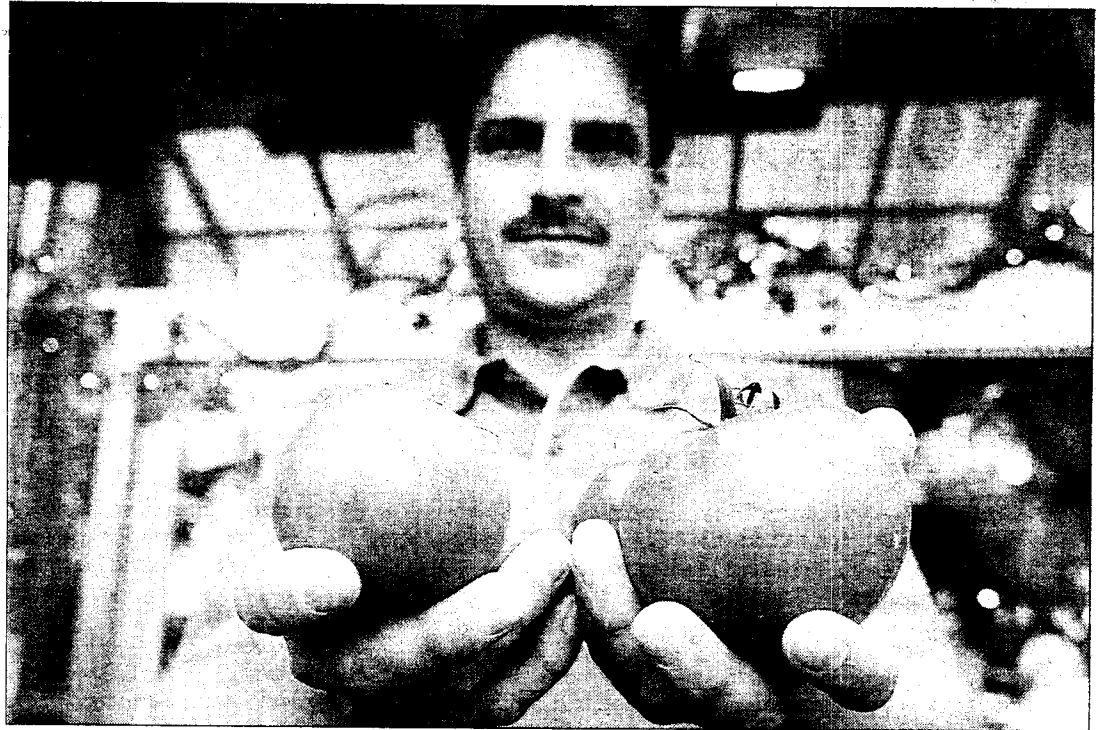
GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

DETROIT — Agencies that collect and distribute food for the hungry say emergency food needs are increasing in Michigan amid a tough economy, but gardeners in the state are helping meet those requests.

Earlier this week, Paul Hudak and Sherry Huntley dropped off a sack of vegetables from their garden for the Plant a Row for the Hungry program. Hudak told the Detroit Free Press for a Friday story that sharing extra food is "the right thing to do."

"You just walk right in the store and put your produce in the bin and off you go," said Hudak, 38. "I think once other people find out how easy it is to take their extra produce in, a lot more people will do it."

Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan, like other emergency food providers, encourages gardeners to donate extra produce. The Detroit-based agency works with 440 food pantries and soup kitchens.



KATHLEEN GALLIGAN/Gannett News Service

Surplus crops: Paul Hudak, 38, of Berlin Township stands at the English Gardens store Tuesday in Clinton Township with tomatoes from his garden. Hudak donates vegetables through the Plant a Row for the Hungry program. Forgotten Harvest collects produce donated at English Gardens stores and distributes it to agencies that feed those in need.

Augie Fernandes, Gleaners' president and chief executive, said one food pantry in South Lyon reported a 40 percent jump from a year ago in the amount of food being distributed. Others have reported increasing re-

quests as well.

"That's quite a startling number. We see it throughout the state," Fernandes said.

Michigan's 7 percent unemployment rate in July was the nation's highest.

"People have run out of benefits and have not been able to find another job. They desperately need the food to help their families survive," said Sue Sherbow, deputy director of Forgotten Harvest of Southfield.

Network serves uninsured

Since its start two years ago, Livonia-based Z.I.A.D. has delivered health care to thousands.

By Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

LIVONIA -- Marie Johnson, 25, doesn't have health insurance, even though she works full-time. But she has been able to get medical care through Z.I.A.D. Healthcare for the Underserved, a network of physicians and other health professionals that provides inexpensive or free health care to uninsured patients.

Since it started two years ago in Livonia, Z.I.A.D. has grown to include 45 health care providers with offices across southeast Michigan.

"I thought it was real reasonable," said Johnson, who was able to have a yearly physical with an OB-GYN at a reduced cost.

Z.I.A.D. patients are charged on a sliding scale according to income. In some cases, patients are treated at no charge.

The organization is run by Ibrahim Ahmed, a nurse; and his wife, Julie Jernigan-Ahmed. Neither is paid for their work.

The group is searching for benefactors and grants to help sustain the project. So far, the group has recruited doctors with offices in Clinton Township, Westland, Hazel Park, Caro, Livonia, Detroit, Troy, Southfield, Farmington Hills, Dearborn, Trenton and Oak Park.

"In 2003 we saw 1,500 people, and that doubled last year in 2004. We're seeing about 3,000 patients per year," Jernigan-Ahmed said. "I'm thinking it's probably doubled again this year so far."

Z.I.A.D. was founded by Ahmed and three others: Ray Zak, a physician's assistant, Dr. Iqbal Nasir and Dr. Theodore Densley. Their initials compose the name Z.I.A.D.

The couple hopes to raise enough money at two events to provide some supplies and medicines to participating physicians.

"As far as the physicians go, they're donating supplies right now. They charge a \$10 minimum, but they supply all their supplies and staff," Jernigan-Ahmed said. "We're trying to get a little funding so that at least their medical supplies are covered."

"We're also working to get pharmaceuticals for the physicians to stock in their office," she added. "That's a huge issue because the medicine is so expensive."

Health care for uninsured

- Z.I.A.D. Healthcare for the Underserved is a network of physicians that provides low-cost or free health care to people without insurance.
- The group is looking for sponsors and participants for two fund-raising events: a golf outing on Sept. 15 at Cherry Creek Golf Course and a "Dash for Health" at the University of Michigan-Dearborn on Oct. 29.
- For information, or to obtain a referral to a physician, call (734) 347-1462, or visit the group's Web site at ziadhealthcare.org.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Allegan County may increase vaccine prices

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

Special to Hometown (Kalamazoo) Gazette

ALLEGAN -- At least one Allegan County commissioner is balking at increasing vaccine fees charged by the county Health Department.

At the Sept. 1 Committee of the Whole meeting of the Allegan County Board of Commissioners, Allegan County Health Officer Rashmi Genesan asked commissioners to raise fees for nine vaccines because of rising prices. She also asked the board to raise the administration fee from \$15 to \$20.

The administration fee, which would be included in the charge for the vaccines, covers costs such as rent, insurance and personnel. She estimated that true administration costs run about \$54.

"Given that our clients have an inability to pay, ... we've set it conservatively at \$20," she told commissioners. Genesan said that no one would be turned down because of inability to pay and that some Medicaid clients also wouldn't have to pay because of Medicaid regulations.

Commissioner Max Thiele objected. He said he could understand the vaccine-cost increases but argued that those costs were being covered by other sources. "It appears to me you're being paid doubly," he said.

Commissioner David Babbitt said the state is supposed to pay half of the costs and that it isn't holding up its part of the bargain.

County Administrator Michael Lombardo said that the revenues generated by such fees are taken into account when the county budget is developed.

"This is a way to offset, perhaps, what general-fund portion we do pay," he said.

The requested prices for the nine vaccines, including the administration fee, were Menomune, \$110; pneumococcal, \$45; typhoid, \$65; yellow fever, \$90; pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for children, \$90; hepatitis B, \$30; rabies, \$185; inactivated influenza, \$30; and live-attenuated influenza, \$40.

The committee voted 8-2 to send the request to the formal board meeting on Thursday.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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September 2, 2005*

MEDIA ADVISORY

Governor Granholm to Announce New Legislation to Protect Seniors

LANSING - Governor Jennifer M. Granholm will hold a press avail on Tuesday, September 6, at 10:15 a.m. in the press auditorium located on the first floor of the Romney Building, 111 S. Capitol Avenue in downtown Lansing.

The Governor will be joined by Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski and others to announce new legislation to protect seniors and vulnerable adults.

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United Way to target regional issues

Southeast Michigan funding organization plans to pare agenda, giving less money to some causes.

By Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

In a move that has some nonprofit organizations uneasy, the United Way of Southeastern Michigan is overhauling its mission so it can target a few of the region's most pressing social problems.

Agencies that address the causes United Way will focus on could see more money, but those with other programs could see less. Having survived a cut in United Way dollars when the organization slashed funding last year because of years of shortfalls and government cutbacks, some are worried it will be even more difficult to provide for the region's neediest residents.

"It could be a blessing for some or a curse for others that may not fit within that community impact model," said Mike Sapp, chief operating officer of the Wayland headquarters of Paws With A Cause, which watched as the Heart of West Michigan United Way began community impact work during the 1990s. "It's all going to depend on what they come up with, what the community stakeholders say they want to fund."

The local United Way and others across the nation are re-evaluating their approach as primarily fund-raising arms and embarking on what they call community impact work. The change in direction comes as United Way of America urges all of its 1,350 local affiliates to take on active roles in solving social ills in their communities. It also comes as the local United Way's largest fund-raiser begins on Friday. The organization hopes to raise \$66.5 million during this year's 57th Torch Drive to help support its 155 member service agencies.

Exactly what social problems the local United Way will tackle is unknown. It plans to identify them through surveys, focus groups and community input within the next year. In three years, it plans to have a new alignment of partners, which will not include some of the social service agencies it funds now, officials said.

This has some local nonprofits uneasy about what the new focus will mean for them.

"Every agency is going to tell you they are doing important things," said Bernard Miller, executive director of the Optometric Institute and Clinic of Detroit, which receives \$70,000 from United Way and is one of the state's few providers of eye care for the underinsured. "But if we close our doors, literally hundreds and hundreds of people in Metropolitan Detroit will go blind. That's the impact we have on our community. People depend on us to save their eyesight."

United Way chief executive Mike Brennan said it's too early to say which agencies or how many will no longer receive funding, but community-decided issues will guide the board of directors' decision. But the process will include an "appropriate exit strategy" for agencies that are not part of the long-term alignment, expected to be in place by July 2008.

The new direction, Brennan said, is necessary to improve collaboration between organizations on social problems because no organization can do it alone. United Way will look at eliminating duplicated services, bridging gaps and aligning existing resources to tackle the issues the community cares about, he said.

It's unknown which of the social service partners will fit into the picture.

The United Way assists agencies that work directly with those in need, such as the elderly, disabled and children in crisis. Some of these agencies' missions fall under broad categories, such as those that nurture youth, strengthen families and empower neighborhoods and those that promote health.

The social problems United Way will tackle will be more concrete and will include between three and six issues.

Kurt Metzger, research director at Wayne State's Center for Urban Studies, is hoping those issues won't be those that keep popping up in surveys and tend to be the concerns of the day, such as teenage drug use.

"They're going to have to come up with some issues that can make a difference," Metzger said.

He thinks an issue worthy of addressing is keeping kids in schools and helping them see the possibilities of a future with advanced education. This effort, he said, would get to the root of the problem of violence in some communities.

"A lot of kids are floundering," Metzger said. "There needs to be a more coordinated effort that kids throughout the region are getting."

Brennan agreed that the issues identified shouldn't be issues of the day. "You always have to be careful on balancing on the issue of the day and what in fact are root cause issues that need to be targeted," he said.

The new approach has been embraced by several United Ways across the country, including Atlanta, Minneapolis and Phoenix.

The United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta was among the first to make the change 11 years ago, said Mark Dvorak, vice president/marketing and communications of the Atlanta United Way.

Though it has focused on early learning initiatives, it has made the most headway on homelessness in recent years by working with area agencies to create a blueprint to end the problem in 10 years. It also opened a gateway homeless service center to connect people to local services.

Dvorak said the new direction has made them more responsive and accountable to their donors and the community.

Before United Way Community Services merger earlier this year with United Way of Oakland County, the Oakland County United Way began a community impact-type project.

For seven years, it has been trying to make sure children are ready for school by enhancing early childhood efforts. Its efforts have included working with 42 partners to address the county's high infant mortality rate and helping 18 day care programs in Pontiac get national accreditation.

"We ran a fair program before," said Angela Johnson, whose Pontiac home day care is now nationally accredited as a result of the United Way effort. "But the standard of excellence is higher. The quality is higher."

In the meantime, local nonprofit organizations and those who receive services from them say they are cautiously optimistic about their future relationship with United Way as it begins its new mission.

Milford resident Dian Kolis said she only hopes Paws With A Cause -- the agency that provided her with an assistance dog that has helped her live more fully with her Parkinson's disease -- won't lose funding. "It gives us hope for the future," Kolis said.

Torch Drive

- The annual Torch Drive begins Friday through Nov. 22. To kick off the event, more than 1,000 volunteers from companies, youth groups, service organizations and individuals in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties will perform one-time volunteer projects during the Days of Caring event Friday and Saturday. Projects include building wheelchair ramps, packing food, painting and neighborhood cleanups.
- For information on how to get involved or how to donate, call (313) 226-9430 or visit www.uwcs.org/donate/donate.

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Arsenal, Focus: HOPE join forces

September 6, 2005

BY DAN CORTEZ

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Gary Barber didn't join the military like his brother, but he fights the war on terror every day with steel stock and a lathe.

Barber is working toward a bachelor's degree as a machining student at Focus: HOPE. As part of his schooling, he is gaining hands-on experience making replacement and spare parts for U.S. Army personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I want to manufacture the parts to the best of my ability," Barber, 25, of Detroit said earlier this month. "It helps out the soldiers."

The nonprofit Focus: HOPE has long been an agent for peace in racially torn Detroit. But in recent years it has evolved to include a diverse educational program teaching machining and engineering skills that, ironically, aid the war effort.

Students such as Barber earn degrees from either the University of Detroit or Wayne State University while learning hands-on skills at Focus: HOPE. Eight students are currently making military parts under a Focus: HOPE subcontract with Alion Science and Technology, a McLean, Va.-based company that does work through the Detroit Arsenal.

Most of the work is for small yet essential replacement parts: a bracket for a steering column here, a mount to hold an antenna there. Some 8,000 parts manufactured at Focus: HOPE's headquarters on Oakman Boulevard have made their way overseas. And the orders keep coming. The unpredictability of war means that Focus: HOPE has to be flexible in its relationship with the military.

"We get something new once every week or two," said Bruce O'Neill, project manager in the Center for Advanced Technologies at Focus: HOPE.

Working with the Detroit Arsenal in Warren, the nonprofit also helped research and develop a Mobile Parts Hospital -- an 8-by-20-foot enclosed workspace that allows soldiers in a war zone to quickly manufacture replacement parts for military vehicles. The unit includes a Mazak lathe and the capability to communicate back to Focus: HOPE in Detroit to retrieve technical data to build parts.

The first parts hospital arrived in Kuwait two years ago. Units have since been placed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

O'Neill said the late Father William Cunningham -- who died in 1997 -- and Dennis Wend, director of the National Automotive Center at the Detroit Arsenal, had the idea to collaborate in support of U.S. troops. The concept for the parts hospital was hatched five years ago, but the military started looking at it closely after soldiers were deployed to Afghanistan and later Iraq. That led developers to expedite the design and construction.

One person from Alion and another on behalf of Focus: HOPE are at each unit overseas to build parts for the troops and help improve the parts hospital. O'Neill is in touch with personnel overseas almost daily.

And eight hours a day, five days a week, Barber does his part to help soldiers overseas.

"I think about that," he said. "It does feel good to help."

Allegan County Crisis Response matches people in need, services

Monday, September 05, 2005

By Ed Ronco
The Grand Rapids Press

ALLEGAN COUNTY -- There are too many stories to tell.

There was the 67-year-old man who could not pay his medical bills, gas bill, mortgage or afford to repair his car.

There was the 17-year-old pregnant girl whose stepdad kicked her out of the house.

There was the 18-year-old high school senior who had been "couch-surfing" since his parents died four years ago, wearing out his welcome until finally, he had nowhere to go but the streets.

All sought help from Allegan County Crisis Response Services Inc., a nonprofit organization that matches people in need with the specific services to help them.

A million more are out there, somewhere, said Brenda Terburg-Fawley, executive director of the organization.

She keeps a picture of an iceberg next to her computer to remind her that for all the people her organization helps every year -- there are more waiting for assistance, just below the surface and out of her view.

The organization, now in its fourth year, is housed in the front offices of Hascall Steel, on Lincoln Road just outside of downtown Allegan. Dag Hascall, co-owner of the steel company, received the group's Soaring Eagle award Tuesday for donating the space.

"I don't think they had to twist my arm that much," Hascall said. "Kids and family come first.

"It really makes you feel warm to know that there's this kind of support for people who don't have something to fall back on."

Once upon a time, Santa Sweitzer was one of those people.

Late in her pregnancy and homeless for three months, Sweitzer, her husband and her children came to the center in January. Everything else they had tried, including living at the homes of friends and relatives, had failed.

"A few days here, a few days there," she said. "It's high stress. It's desperation.

"You can't do what you know you're supposed to do for your kids, because nobody will help you."

Allegan County Crisis Response Services placed her with a host family and a mentor from January through March -- enough time for Sweitzer and her husband to find employment.

The family -- including five children after the recent birth of 6-month-old Takota -- now lives in a four-bedroom house with a garage, a laundry room and, best of all, a yard for the kids to play in.

The organization saved her, she said.

"Without them, my husband and I would not have survived."

Michigan leads the nation in unemployment, but the problem is particularly bad in Allegan County, said state Sen. Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck, who was on hand for Tuesday's award ceremony.

Industry in the Southwest Michigan county has moved out bit by bit, including Menasha, an Otsego-based paper company that closed its doors this summer.

The Allegan County crisis organization -- which relies on partner agencies to provide many services -- uses its money efficiently and believes in helping people to start helping themselves, Birkholz said.

"Knowing that we have organizations like that in this community strengthens me and reinforces me as a legislator," she said. "We want efficiency and effectiveness and accountability.

"You help the families help themselves."

Bold brushstrokes Hand-painted carousel animals to be auctioned

Tuesday, September 6, 2005

BY CATHERINE O'DONNELL
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

The carousel stuff is true, at least in that carousel animals have been appearing in public.

Students from five area high schools and three local artists painted six carousel animals that will be auctioned Oct. 14 at The Festive Affair, the 14th annual benefit for the Staples Family Center, the Salvation Army's homeless shelter on Packard Road.

Mady Clinton and David Grant, seniors at Community High School, painted a big, roaring lion: Fernando il Magnifico.

Based on the lions of Venice, Fernando's body is a bold swirl of red and gold. His mane is aquamarine and gold; his saddle blanket is royal blue and gold. He sports a harlequin mask and below it, front and center in his mouth, a bright gold tooth.

Grant, 17, takes credit for the tooth: "That's my touch."

The design grew out of brainstorming last winter in the school's advanced art class. As members of the class, Clinton and Grant painted the lion.

"It was a learning experience," Grant said. "Every angle of the creature had to be considered and every surface required several coats of paint."

And while Clinton and Grant painted steadily for months, they finished the last coat of varnish only a day or so before their lion was to go on tour.

Salvation Army benefactor Ken Staples, a local builder, and the Festive Affair board have chauffeured the creatures - a lion, giraffe, tiger and two horses - to places including the Dexter Daze parade last month and several stores at the Westgate Shopping Center where they remained through the final days of August. The carousel creatures have moved to downtown Chelsea; Saturday they'll be featured in the Saline Community Fair parade; and the last week of September they'll be in downtown Ann Arbor.

Joining them, beginning in Chelsea, will be a carved wooden horse painted by Ypsilanti Township artist Carolyn McKeever and two fellow artists, Mary Gentry and Debra Golden, both of Ypsilanti.

Fanciful creatures have been auctioned at other charity affairs, Staples said. Last year, the Home Builders Association of Livingston County auctioned carousel animals; in Chicago some time ago, a charity benefit raked in a pile of money via whimsically painted cows that were displayed on street corners. During a recent afternoon at Westgate, Cara Bloom, 12, and her sister Audrey, 9, studied Fernando di Magnifico. "I like to touch the swirls," Cara said. "They're like mazes."